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ABSTRACT

In May of 1973 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a request for proposals for the design of a longitudinal national study of the impact of school desegregation. A selection committee unanimously agreed that the proposal from the Rand Corporation was superior to the others, and in June 1973 a contract was signed with that organization. The final draft of the documents which delineate Rand's design were delivered to the Commission in September 1974. The documents were subsequently reviewed by a total of 26 persons, who can roughly be divided into four broad categories; Desegregation and Minority Student Education Experts, Distinguished Social Scientists, Federal Officials Resonsible for Desegregation Research, and U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Staff Members. All reviewers were asked to answer a 27 question multiple choice evaluation questionnaire and to prepare additional written comments. The four multiple choice response categories were: quite good, moderately good, moderately poor and quite poor. These were coded as 1.0 through 4.0, respectively. The overall average rating was 2.37. The written comments of the reviewers reflected a wide range of opinions. Taken as a whole the evaluation of the reviewers suggests caution in using the design, without modification, as a guide for a research study. (Author/JM)

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Summary of Rand Desegregation Design Review and Comments by Reviewers

In May of 1973 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a request for proposals for the design of a longitudinal national study of the impact of school desegregation. The specifications of that request indicated that the study should:

1. be a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of school desegregation
2. have a nationwide sample
3. consider the impact of desegregation in terms of
   a. students' noncognitive outcomes (attitudes and behaviors) as well as academic achievement
   b. teacher attitudes and goals
   c. administrative attitudes and goals
   d. parental reactions
4. assess how variations in the implementation of desegregation at the district level and at the school level affect the impact of desegregation
5. include an evaluation of the impact of desegregation on Spanish speaking youth

Seven organizations with extensive experience in large scale social research responded with proposals. A selection committee unaminously agreed that the proposal from the Rand Corporation was superior to the others, and in June 1973 a contract was signed with that organization.

The Rand project team received feedback on various stages of the design work from Commission staff members, from Commission consultants who were retained specifically for this purpose, and from other consultants retained by Rand. Rand, however, was given the final authority for determining the nature and details of the design.

The final draft of the documents which delineate Rand's design were delivered to the Commission in September 1974. The documents were

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subsequently reviewed by a total of 26 persons, who can roughly be divided into four broad categories: Desegregation and Minority Student Education Experts, Distinguished Social Scientists, Federal Officials Responsible for Desegregation Research, and U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Staff Members. Non-Federal reviewers were compensated for their work in reading, analyzing, and commenting on the document. All reviewers were asked to answer a 27 question multiple choice evaluation questionnaire and to prepare additional written comments. The four multiple choice responses on the evaluation questionnaire were: quite good, moderately good, moderately poor and quite poor. For purposes of tabulation these were coded as 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0, respectively.

The overall average rating was 2.37, somewhat below "moderately good," but slightly above the midpoint in the rating scale. The average rating of the most favorable reviewer was 1.3, and of the least favorable reviewer was 3.5. The best ratings were given to the following factors: how well the design makes use of previous school desegregation research, the feasibility of implementing the non-experimental design, and the ethicalness of both options. The average ratings for each of these questions were between 1.6 and 2.0. The least favorable ratings were in respect to: how well the design states questions or hypotheses specifically enough to be efficiently researched; the ability of the design to accurately assess the impact of desegregation if most of the schools in the sample remain segregated or desegregated for the duration of the study; the extent to which the design adequately provides

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mechanism for encouraging the sampled schools to participate in the study. These ratings averaged between 2.7 and 2.8.

Of the four groups of reviewers, the Distinguished Social Scientists gave the design the most favorable average rating (1.96) and the U.S.C.C.R. Staff gave it the least favorable average rating (2.82). The Federal Officials Responsible for Desegregation Research and the Desegregation and Minority Student Education Experts were in the middle with average ratings of 2.48 and 2.66, respectively.

The written comments of the reviewers also reflected a wide range of opinion. The Rand study was given strong endorsement by a couple of the reviewers, was judged to be extremely flawed by a few other reviewers, and was found by most reviewers to have some major inadequacies. Virtually all major aspects of the design received strong criticism from at least a few of the reviewers; especially noted were difficulties in the proposed definitions of desegregation, the focus of the design (or the lack of focus), the sampling procedures, the methods of control, and the instruments.

Taken as a whole the evaluation of the reviewers suggests caution in using the design, without modification, as a guide for a research study. Aside from questions regarding substantive elements of the design, the design also suggests a study so large and encompassing that adequate management of it is highly questionable. Despite these problems it is the Commission's opinion that the Rand design and reviewers' comments represent some of the most important documents on school desegregation

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research now in existence. It is the Commission's view that these documents will be of invaluable assistance in furthering work in this field.

The study of school desegregation still has a high priority on the Commission's agenda, and the Commission plans to pursue significant desegregation research. A preliminary description of one approach to such research already has been developed by Commission staff, and in expanding this or generating other possibilities, all aspects of the Rand effort will be reviewed further.

Three documents are being released today: the Rand design for a longitudinal study of school desegregation and two summaries of the comments of the persons who reviewed the design. (The Rand design is in two volumes, while a third volume with research instruments is available directly from Rand.) The summaries of the reviewers' comments were prepared by the Commission staff and by the Rand project director who was responsible for the design effort.

It is hoped that these documents together will alert researchers to some of the conceptual and methodological difficulties which exist in studying the impact of school desegregation, and will help them to overcome these difficulties in future designs for research on this important topic.

The documents are available without charge, so long as a limited supply lasts, from the Office of Information and Publication, U.S. Commission

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on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C. 20425. Researchers who are interested in further information may contact Dr. Eugene S. Mornell, Special Assistant to the Staff Director, at (202) 254-6644.